



THE LIBERTY BOYS OF '76

A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution.

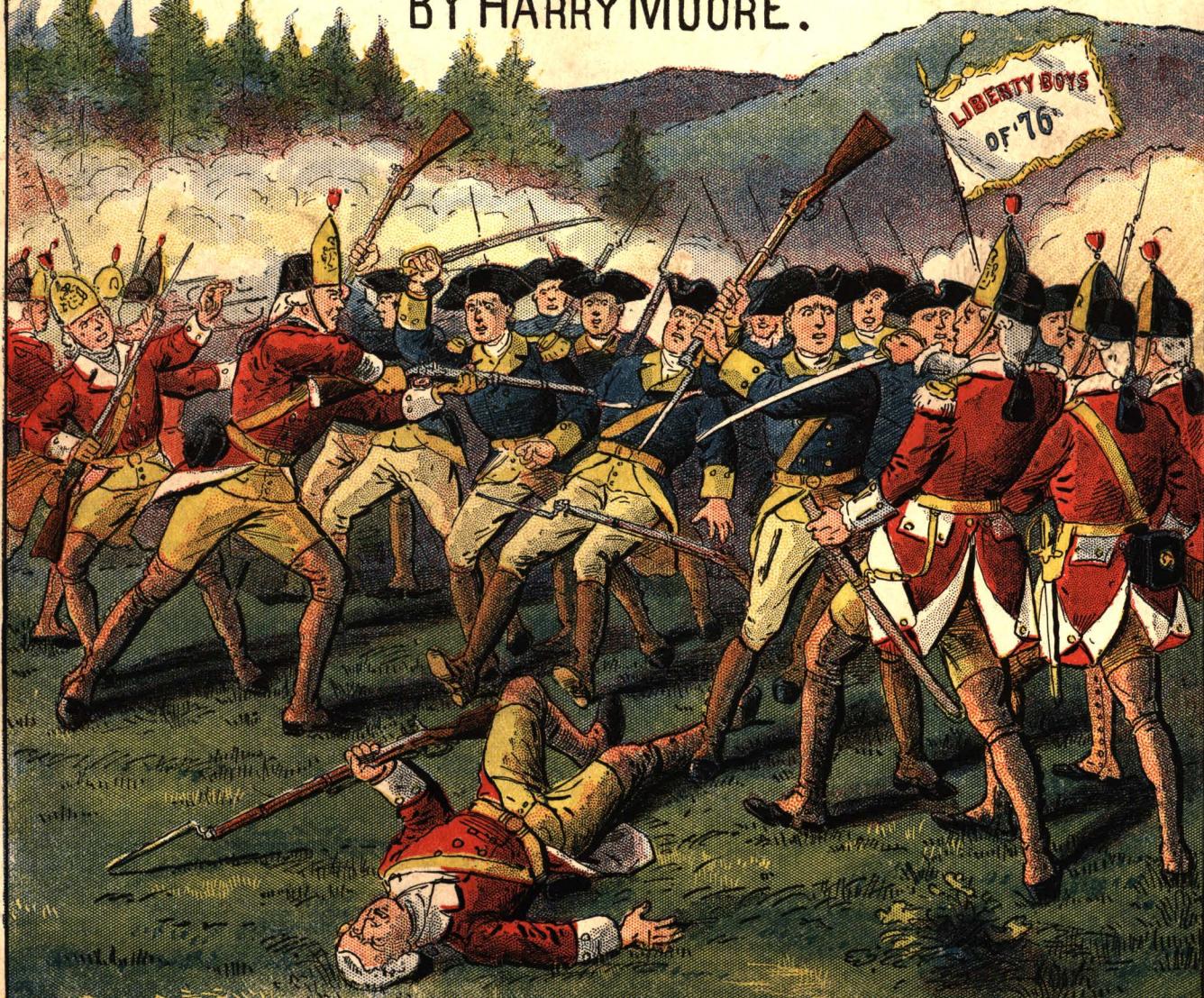
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NO. 18.

NEW YORK, MAY 3. 1901.

Price 5 Cents.

The LIBERTY BOYS' CHALLENGE; OR PATRIOTS VS. REDCOATS. BY HARRY MOORE.



The British accepted the challenge to come out in the open and fight. The result was a fierce hand-to-hand encounter between the patriots and redcoats.

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CHAPTER I.

CELEBRATING.

It was the evening of the 4th day of July, 1777.

It was the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

The patriot army had moved from Middlebrook, N. J., back to Morristown Heights.

Washington had given his soldiers permission and they were celebrating the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

The soldiers were celebrating another event, also.

In the patriot army was a company of youths known as the "Liberty Boys of '76."

These "Liberty Boys" were daring youths.

There was nothing too daring for them to attempt.

They had been members of the patriot army one year.

And in that time they had become famous.

They had performed daring feats without number.

They had done more fighting, more foraging, more scouting, had captured more prisoners, had in fact done the British more damage than any other three or four companies of the entire army.

They were young and enthusiastic.

They were brave and daring.

Whatever work they entered upon was put through with an energy that was characteristic of them.

And the "Liberty Boys" had just performed one of the most daring feats of their career.

In the bay of New York a fleet of vessels were anchored.

It was Admiral Howe's fleet of British warships.

The night before, Dick Slater, captain of the "Liberty Boys of '76," aided by eighteen other members of his company, had, under the cover of darkness, slipped aboard one of these warships.

The crew of this ship had gone over into New York City on short-leave.

Two men only had remained on board as watchmen.

These men were made prisoners by the "Liberty Boys."

Then the "Liberty Boys," who had been selected for this duty because of the fact that they understood how

to do the work of sailors, had set sail and escaped out of the harbor with the warship.

They had sailed the ship down the coast, and leaving it securely hidden in the little bay, they had secured horses and ridden to Morristown, where they had arrived about six o'clock in the evening.

Their arrival and the story they had to tell of their wonderful success in capturing the British warship created great excitement.

The patriot soldiers were delighted.

The "Liberty Boys" were congratulated on every hand.

They had performed one of the most daring feats on record.

They bore their honors modestly, however.

The "Liberty Boys" were not bigoted.

Perhaps the best pleased man of all was General Washington.

The commander-in-chief had given his consent for the "Liberty Boys" to make the attempt to capture the British warship, but, although having great confidence in their abilities, he had had doubts regarding their being able to succeed.

But the "Liberty Boys" had succeeded.

They had captured a British man-of-war.

The vessel was securely hidden in a little bay over on the Jersey coast, and might prove of inestimable value to the patriot cause later on.

The commander-in-chief had complimented Dick Slater, the brave young captain of the "Liberty Boys," in no measured terms.

"You have done splendidly, Dick," he said, with as near a show of enthusiasm as a man of his iron-like composure was capable of showing; "I will admit that I was doubtful regarding your being successful, but you have succeeded, and now I cannot compliment you too highly."

Dick blushed.

"Say no more, your excellency," he said; "our thanks are due you for giving us permission to make the attempt. We enjoyed it greatly, I assure you, and the knowledge that we succeeded and got safely away with one of the British warships, thus striking a blow for the cause of liberty, is reward enough for us. We are never so happy as when we

have been enabled to do something which may prove of benefit to the patriot army and its fight for independence."

"Well said, my boy! Nobly spoken! I know your heart is in the right place, and that the members of your 'Liberty Boys' are like you. I wish I had a few thousand such troops! I would drive the British aboard their ships at the point of the bayonet, and send them sailing back toward England faster than they came!"

Dick flushed with pleasure.

He was delighted to know that the commander-in-chief thought so highly of himself and his brave "Liberty Boys."

"I fear you rate us too highly," he said, modestly.

"Not at all, my boy," declared Washington. "What I have said is only a statement of the facts. Of course, I would not speak thus to you, Dick, did I not know that you are a youth of rare good judgment and not at all vain and self-important. I am well aware that praise will often work injury to a person at all given to vanity, even though the praise may be deserved, but I am also aware that praise bestowed upon a person of good common sense will have a good effect and encourage a person to make still greater efforts."

Dick knew that General Washington was right.

He was a youth with a remarkably level head, and a little praise from the great man, while giving Dick pleasure, would not have the least tendency to make him bigoted or self-conceited.

The commander-in-chief was silent for some moments.

He gazed intently at the floor.

Presently he turned and looked at Dick.

"The British have evacuated New Jersey," he said in a semi-musing tone; they have gone over onto Staten Island and encamped within musket-shot distance of Admiral Howe's fleet. Now the question is, what will they do next?"

"That is a hard question to answer, your excellency," said Dick.

"Indeed it is, my boy; but I must learn, if possible, what their intentions are."

He paused and was silent for a few moments.

Then he again looked at Dick, a half smile on his face.

"I guess I will have to call upon you again, Dick," he said; "there is only one way to find out what I wish to know."

"And that is——"

"By sending you among the British as a spy, Dick."

The youth's eyes glowed.

"I am ready to go, your excellency, if it is your wish that I should do so."

"How soon can you be ready to start?"

"Within the hour, sir."

"It will not be necessary to start immediately. You have just reached here after a long and tiresome ride, and ought to have a few hours' rest."

"I got a few hours' sleep last night," said Dick; "and feel first rate; since there is no hurry, however, I will wait two or three hours and rest a bit before starting."

"Do so."

Dick and the general conversed for half an hour longer.

The commander-in-chief gave Dick such instructions as he thought necessary.

When the interview was ended, Dick bade General Washington good-by, saluted, and withdrew.

He returned at once to the quarters occupied by the "Liberty Boys."

They greeted him with cheers.

"He comes!" cried Bob Estabrook, with rather an extravagant air; "see, the conquering hero comes!"

Bob struck an attitude, his arm extended, the index finger pointing at Dick.

"Fellows," he said, "there is the boy who beat the British every time he makes the attempt. Three cheers for Dick Slater, who captured a British warship, stealing it right out from under the owners' noses!"

"Hurrah for Dick Slater!"

The cheers could have been heard half a mile.

There were many other soldiers besides the "Liberty Boys" present, and they joined in the cheering in a hearty manner.

Dick was well known and well liked by all.

There was no other one person, aside from the generals, who was so well liked or so popular as was Dick.

Bob Estabrook was Dick's closest friend.

They had practically grown up together.

Their homes were near Tarrytown, N. Y., and were less than a quarter of a mile distant from each other.

The youths each had a sister, Edith Slater and Alice Estabrook, and the youths were in love with each other's sister.

This made them even greater friends, cementing the friendship as it were.

As we have said, the patriot soldiers were celebrating the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, and the great success achieved by the "Liberty Boys" in capturing the British warship.

They were having as good a time as it was possible for them to have with the limited means at their command.

Dick did not remain with them long, however.

He had been in the saddle all day and was tired.

He soon slipped away, and making his way to the room occupied jointly by himself and Bob, threw himself down on a cot intending to take a short rest before starting on his expedition.

Bob had seen him make the move, however, and followed him.

"What's up, old man?" he asked. "Has the commander-in-chief given you some more work to do?"

"Yes, Bob."

"What is it?"

"Spy work, Bob."

"Then you are to go among the British again?"

"Yes."

"Good! I'm going with you, Dick."

Bob's tone was eager.

Dick pondered a few moments.

He had intended going alone.

But after all he decided it might prove to be a good plan to take Bob along.

In case he discovered anything of importance and wished to inform General Washington of it at once, he could send Bob with the message and remain to keep surveillance over the British.

"Oh, I'm going, Dick!" said Bob, determinedly.

He did not wait to give Dick a chance to refuse.

"All right, Bob," said Dick. "You shall go. I may need you to carry a message to General Washington, as was the case the other day."

"All right; I am the man for the job, Dick. How soon will we start?"

"Oh, in about three hours."

"That will be at about ten o'clock, then."

"Yes."

Bob was greatly pleased.

He was a youth of action.

He thrived on excitement and danger.

Dick was a good deal of the same temperament, save that he was quieter and more self-contained.

Bob was inclined to be a little bit too enthusiastic and reckless.

Dick was more conservative and cautious.

Both were as brave as lions.

They did not know the meaning of the word "fear."

They were well constituted to go together on expeditions such as this on which they were about to start.

They talked their plans over for a few minutes longer, and then Bob threw himself down to take a little needed rest, as he also had been in the saddle all day.

It was just ten o'clock when the youths, mounted on fresh horses, left the encampment and rode away in the darkness.

CHAPTER II.

DICK AND BOB AT WORK.

Dick and Bob were in no especial hurry, so they rode at a moderate pace.

On their former expedition to Staten Island, they had been entertained at the home of a Mr. Hardy, a strong patriot.

As Mr. Hardy's home was within an hour's walk of the British encampment, it would form a good basis from which to work while spying upon the British.

So Dick intended going there.

Bob thought this would be a good plan also.

It was about one o'clock when they reached the strip of water separating Staten Island from New Jersey.

They rode into the water and swam their horses across to the Staten Island shore.

They approached the shore cautiously, for they did not know but that there might be redcoats in the vicinity.

The British picket lines did not extend that far south, however, and the youths were not challenged.

They rode into the timber and made their way in the direction of Mr. Hardy's cabin.

The cabin was about six miles distant, and as the youths' progress through the timber was slow, they were more than an hour in reaching the cabin.

As they emerged from the timber into the little clearing in the centre of which stood Mr. Hardy's cabin, they saw a sight which excited them and aroused their indignation.

The cabin was on fire.

By the light thrown out by the blazing cabin, the youths saw that a struggle was going on.

One man seemed to be struggling with five or six men.

The man in question had on citizen's clothes, while the others had on brilliant scarlet uniforms.

A little to one side, held by three or four other redcoats, were a woman and a girl.

The youths understood the situation in an instant.

The redcoats, knowing that Mr. Hardy was a patriot, had come for the purpose of taking him prisoner.

Doubtless they had set fire to the cabin and had then aroused the inmates and informed them of what had been done.

Then when Mr. and Mrs. Hardy and Mabel had rushed out, Mrs. Hardy and Mabel had been seized and held by three or four of the redcoats, while the others attacked Mr. Hardy.

The youths sized up the situation very quickly.

There was not to exceed ten of the redcoats.

"I think we can frighten them away, Bob," said Dick.

"We can try it at any rate, Dick."

"So we can. We'll charge them, yelling and firing as we go, and I think they will take to their heels and run."

"They had better do so!" said Bob, grimly; "if they don't, some of them will carry broken heads back to their camp with them!"

"Right, Bob! Are you ready?"

"Ready!"

"Then—forward!"

The youths put spurs to their horses, and rode down upon the British.

When they were about halfway to the cabin, they began shouting and yelling at the top of their voices:

"Come on, boys!" shouted Dick. "We've got them now! Don't let a villain escape!"

Bob shouted words to similar effect, and then as they drew nearer, each fired a pistol shot.

The British were taken entirely by surprise.

So far as they could judge by the clatter of the horses' feet, there might be a score of horsemen.

Then, too, Dick and Bob made as much noise as a dozen ordinary men would be supposed to be capable of making.

The result was that the British became badly frightened.

They let go their hold upon the woman and girl, and quit struggling with Mr. Hardy.

Then they took to their heels and ran with all their might.

Doubtless they thought a regiment was attacking them.

In order to make sure that the redcoats would be so thoroughly frightened as to not return, Dick and Bob chased them clear across the clearing and into the timber.

The redcoats were good sprinters.

They kept in advance of the horses, and the youths rode at a gallop, too.

When the timber was reached, and the redcoats disappeared within it, the youths turned and rode back to the cabin.

They found Mr. and Mrs. Hardy and Mabel hard at work, trying to extinguish the flames, and save the house from burning down.

Dick and Bob leaped to the ground, and went to their assistance.

There was plenty of water.

There was a well, full almost to the top, and this made the chances for extinguishing the flames very good indeed.

In fact the fire was not making rapid headway.

The logs were heavy ones, and it was hard for the flames to get hold.

The flames had gradually worked upward and attacked the roof.

Dick climbed up on the roof, however, and Bob passed him up water, and the youth presently succeeded in stopping the fire there.

Half an hour's hard work was all that was required.

Then the fire-fiend was conquered.

The fire was extinguished; the cabin was saved.

Then Mr. and Mrs. Hardy and Mabel greeted Dick and Bob, and thanked them for what they had just done.

"If you had not come we would have lost our home!" said Mr. Hardy.

"Yes, and worse than that, you would have been taken into the British encampment a prisoner!" said Mrs. Hardy.

"Oh, I'm so glad you did come!" said Mabel, with a shudder, as she thought of how herself and mother had been jerked about by the redcoats.

"And so are we glad we came!" said Dick; "and we are exceedingly glad that we got here in time to be of benefit to you. We feel better, for we owed you considerable for your kindness to us a few days ago."

"Oh, that was all right," said Mr. Hardy; "you owed us nothing for that. We were glad to do something to aid the great cause. And we are very, very glad to know that you were successful in capturing the British warship!"

"Those redcoats who were just here told us all about it," said Mrs. Hardy; "and that was why they came here after Sam. They said he had given information and aid to you."

"Which goes still farther to prove that we were doing only our duty in helping you just now," said Dick. "We really brought this trouble upon you."

"I think they would have come to try to capture me, anyway," said Mr. Hardy; "you know the first time you came here, several nights ago, the redcoats were here looking for me."

"True," admitted Dick.

Then Dick told Mr. Hardy what he and Bob had returned to that part of the country for, and asked if they might remain at Mr. Hardy's house the rest of that night.

and use it as a sort of base from which to operate in their work of spying on the British.

The reply was prompt and hearty.

They were more than welcome to do so, Mr. Hardy assured them.

He said that he should be glad to have them remain there as long as they wished, or be there as much as they wished. They were to feel perfectly free to come and go as they saw fit, in fact.

This was just what Dick desired, and he thanked the generous-hearted patriot heartily.

Then the woman and girl entered the house, while Mr. Hardy went with the youths to secrete the horses.

The animals were tied in the midst of a deep thicket, after which the three returned to the house.

Mr. Hardy had feared that the redcoats might return, but they had not done so.

Doubtless they had had all the fight they thought they could stand for one night.

Mr. Hardy decided to remain up the rest of the night, however, and keep watch for the redcoats, and, as they were somewhat sleepy, the youths lay down to get some sleep before morning.

While eating breakfast next morning they explained their purpose in coming to the vicinity, and Mr. Hardy said he would do all he could to aid them.

This pleased the youths.

They knew he might be able to render them valuable assistance.

Indeed, being allowed to make his home their headquarters was a great help to them.

After breakfast the three set out.

Dick wished to see what the British were doing.

They might be making some important move even now.

And he would have felt bad had the British succeeded in doing anything of this kind before he got a chance to spy upon them.

Mr. Hardy cautioned his wife and daughter.

He told them to keep close to the house, and in case any British showed up to go indoors and bar the door.

They promised that they would keep a sharp lookout.

"I don't think there is much danger that the redcoats will return in the daytime," said Dick.

"I hardly expect anything of the kind myself," said Mr. Hardy. "It is best to be careful, however."

"Yes, indeed!" agreed Dick.

The three walked at a good pace.

They kept a sharp lookout.

They thought that they might meet some wandering party of redcoats.

In case they should do so, they wished to see the redcoats first, so as to be able to avoid them.

But fortunately they did not meet any redcoats.

After an hour's walk, they arrived at the top of a good-sized hill.

This hill overlooked the place where the British had encamped after leaving New Jersey the last day of June.

It was an interesting sight which met their gaze, as they looked down from the hilltop.

The distance from where they were, to the waters of New York Bay, was perhaps half a mile.

Lying between the foot of the hill and the bay was the British encampment.

Just off the shore lay the British fleet, numbering more than two hundred vessels of all kinds.

Fifty yards down the side of the hill was the mouth of a little ravine which led down to the encampment.

Dick, Bob, and Mr. Hardy were sitting there behind some bushes, looking down upon the scene, when two British soldiers emerged from the mouth of the ravine and came walking slowly up toward where the three were secreted.

"Jove! we'll be discovered!" exclaimed Bob, in a low tone.

"Perhaps not," replied Dick; "and besides there are but two of them. If they should discover us, we could make them prisoners. If we remain where we are, and they do not discover us, we may learn something of interest."

"True—but it will be dangerous!"

"We'll risk it," said Dick; "lie low now, and keep perfectly quiet!"

The three drew well in among the bushes and hid themselves as well as they could.

They hoped to be able to escape discovery.

On came the redcoats.

The two were conversing earnestly.

They did not seem to be paying much attention to their surroundings.

Their thoughts were on what they were talking about.

Of course, they could have no suspicion that there were enemies near.

They were within pistol-shot distance of their own encampment, and had no idea that any patriots, no matter how daring, would venture that near in the daytime.

It was already, although not yet nine o'clock, quite warm.

The sun was shining clear and hot.

The two redcoats came on up the slope, straight toward where the three were concealed amid the bushes.

The three began to feel somewhat alarmed.

The fear took possession of them that, after all, they were about to be discovered.

It looked as if this might prove to be the case.

The two soldiers were so preoccupied, however, and were so interested in their conversation, that they did not give much attention to anything else.

Closer and closer they came.

They were within perhaps four yards of the spot where the three lay concealed, when they suddenly halted.

They glanced about them.

They then glanced upward.

They were almost under a large tree.

The hidden three now realized what it was that the two were seeking.

A nice, shady spot, where they could throw themselves down and take it easy while they talked.

Their next words proved it.

"Here is a nice place to take a siesta, Murdock," said one.

"It does look cool and inviting, doesn't it!" replied the other.

"It does, for a fact."

Then the two threw themselves down under the tree.

Drawing pipes and tobacco from their pockets, they filled the pipes, lighted them, and smoked for a few moments in silence.

The three patriots hidden not more than a dozen feet distant in the bushes, listened eagerly for the conversation to begin.

They were in hopes that they might learn something of interest.

And in this they were not disappointed.

The very first words given utterance to by one of the redcoats, after they had smoked for a few moments, gave some very interesting information.

The words he gave utterance to were:

"So we are to go aboard the ships to-morrow, eh, Murdock?"

CHAPTER III.

MAKING A CAPTURE.

The other removed the pipestem from his mouth, blew a ring of smoke skyward, watching it lazily through half-closed eyes, and replied:

"That's the order, I understand, Hampton."

"What does it mean?"

The other glanced lazily at his companion.

"You are asking me?" he asked, with an accent on the "me."

"Yes."

The redcoat gave utterance to a short laugh.

"I give it up!"

"You don't know, eh?"

"I rather think not!"

"Can you guess?"

A shake of the head.

"I wouldn't attempt it, old fellow."

"I will admit that it puzzles me, also," said the other. His companion laughed in a rather queer manner.

"I doubt if Howe himself knows why he is going aboard the ships!" he said.

"Or Cornwallis, either?"

"Or Cornwallis, either!"

The other was silent for a few moments, and Dick looked at his companions in a meaning manner.

It was as much as to say, "Well, we seem to be in luck, after all."

"I guess you are right," said the redcoat, presently. "The generals have been doing a lot of fooling around for several months past and have accomplished nothing. They made us very nearly run our legs off down in New Jersey, and now I'll wager something they don't have the least idea what they are having us go aboard the ships for!"

"Maybe they are afraid that young fellow, Dick Slater and his gang of 'Liberty Boys,' will come along and capture us if we remain on land!" said the other, dryly.

Bob poked Dick with his thumb.

He could not help grinning; in fact, he came very near chuckling aloud.

"Judging by what has just happened," was the prompt reply from the redcoat, "we are in more danger of being captured by that fellow and his gang if we go aboard the ships than if we remained ashore!"

"Jove! that's so! Say, that was about the boldest, most daring feat ever performed, I should say! Just think of those fellows coming right into the harbor, boarding a warship—one of more than two hundred—and making away with it, from right under the noses of the entire British arm and navy!"

"It was certainly a daring feat!"

"I should say so!"

"That fellow, Dick Slater, must be a wonderfully daring fellow!"

"Hasn't his record proven it?"

"I guess it has."

"You know it has! Just think of how he and his gang harassed us all last winter and spring!"

"I remember; they came very near making us starve to death, through the boys being afraid to go out foraging."

"That's a fact. Oh, he's certainly a most daring fellow! He is one of the best spies in the patriot army, too. They say he has been within our ranks a score of times, and was never captured but twice, and then he escaped very quickly."

"I guess that's right. Have you ever seen him to know him?"

"No."

"Neither have I, though a lot of the boys have seen him."

"I'd like to see him!"

"So would I."

Dick, who was listening to the conversation of the two with interest, made up his mind that the desires of the two fellows should be gratified.

He decided that he would let them see him before they left the spot.

He would let them talk more, however.

He wished to learn all that he could regarding the intended movements of the British.

The two might be in possession of more information which would be of interest, and beneficial to General Washington.

The two were silent for a few moments.

They smoked industriously.

They seemed to give themselves up to the enjoyment of the moment.

"Be nice if we had nothing to do but lie around like this and smoke and take it easy, eh, Murdock?" presently remarked the fellow addressed as Hampton.

"It certainly would, Hampton!"

The two then conversed on matters of no particular interest to the listeners.

They kept this up perhaps half an hour.

Then they got back to the subject of going aboard the warships.

"I wonder where we are to be taken when we have gone aboard?" asked Hampton.

"Hard telling," was the reply; "I should judge up the Hudson, however."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, it looks to me as though that would be a sensible thing to do. You know, General Burgoyne is coming down

from the north, and I should think it would be the proper thing to do to go up the river to Albany to meet him."

"I should think so, too."

"But there's no telling what they will decide to do; General Howe has his head set on capturing Philadelphia, the rebel capital, and we may go in that direction."

"Well, I don't care which way they go, for my part."

"It isn't worrying me, either."

The two again relapsed into silence and smoked away, gazing up at the branches of the tree which was furnishing them with protection from the rays of the sun.

The two seemed to be thinking and giving themselves up to the full enjoyment of the tobacco.

Dick watched them, while a plan was forming itself in his mind.

He made up his mind to capture the two redcoats.

Then donning their clothing, he and Bob would venture into the British encampment that night.

If possible, he would remain in the camp until next day, and go aboard one of the ships with the soldiers.

If he could possibly do so, he would get aboard Admiral Howe's flagship.

Generals Howe and Cornwallis would be on board the ship, and there would be conferences between them and the admiral.

If he could overhear any of these conferences, he would certainly acquire some valuable information.

Presently the two redcoats began talking of personal matters, and Dick took advantage of this to communicate his plans to his companions.

They offered no objection to his plan.

They had the utmost faith in Dick.

They believed that he knew best what to do.

They were willing to do whatever he wished them to do, and asked no questions.

Dick gave them their instructions.

He did not wish that there should be any misunderstanding.

If they succeeded in capturing the two redcoats, they would have to work together like clockwork.

The redcoats were well-built powerful-looking fellows.

They would undoubtedly make a good fight.

By taking them by surprise, however, Dick and his friends would have an advantage.

Presently Dick decided to act.

He gave his companions the signal.

Slowly and carefully they rose to a sitting posture.

Then with infinite care they rose to a standing position.

They waited a few moments, and then Dick gave the signal.

With one accord the three leaped through the bushes out into the open space, and bounded toward the two reclining men.

In an instant, almost, they were upon the redcoats.

The fellows were taken entirely by surprise.

They attempted to leap to their feet.

But were too late.

The three were upon them and bore them back upon the ground.

The redcoats struggled fiercely.

They gave utterance to oaths and threats.

Dick and his companions said nothing.

They were working hard, however.

They were determined to come out victorious in the contest.

And they did.

Although the redcoats made a valiant fight and resisted with all their might, they were unable to break away and make their escape.

Dick succeeded in getting one by the throat, and speedily choked him into insensibility.

This left Bob and Mr. Hardy free to take care of the other fellow, and they managed it without much trouble.

In one minute's time after having attacked the redcoats, Dick and his companions had the two fellows tied up tight and fast.

The redcoats were prisoners.

"Now, let's take them in here behind the bushes," said Dick.

This was done.

Then Dick, parting the bushes, gazed down into the British camp eagerly.

"I was afraid we might have been seen," he said; "but there seems to be no commotion down in the encampment."

"Oh, I hardly think they saw us," said Mr. Hardy.

"I don't think so, either, Dick," said Bob. "It would have been only by accident had they done so."

"I don't think they saw us," said Dick. "And now," he added, "what are we going to do with our prisoners?"

"I know a good place for them," said Mr. Hardy.

"Where?"

"About a quarter of a mile from here there is a deserted log cabin in the thickest part of the timber, and it will be a fine place to keep these fellows in."

"That will do splendidly," said Dick. "We will take them there at once."

The redcoat whom Dick had choked had recovered his

senses by this time, and the two were lifted to their feet and forced to walk.

The little party made its way slowly through the timber.

Mr. Hardy led the way.

Dick and Bob followed, each holding to the arm of a prisoner.

A five minutes' walk brought them to the cabin.

It proved to be an old tumbled down affair.

It would do for a prison-pen for the two redcoats, however.

The redcoats had not spoken since having been made prisoners.

Now, however, the fellow who had been addressed by his companion as Murdock, found his voice.

"What do you mean by making us prisoners in this manner?" he asked.

"It doesn't matter," replied Dick; "we have our reasons, and that is sufficient."

The redcoat looked at Dick sharply.

Somehow he seemed impressed by Dick's looks and bearing.

A thought suddenly struck him.

He gave a start.

"What is your name?" he asked suddenly.

"My name," replied Dick, quietly, "is Dick Slater."

"I thought so!" the redcoat exclaimed.

"What made you think so?" asked Dick.

"Why, I was sure no one else would dare attempt what you have just accomplished."

"Oh, I don't know about that. There are plenty of patriots who would have done the same thing and thought nothing of it."

"Well, it seems to me that it was a rather daring thing to attempt. We were in sight from our encampment, and if you had been seen, a whole regiment might have been up there in a jiffy."

"But they didn't see us," said Dick.

The three remained at the old cabin all day. They had brought plenty of food with them, and when they got hungry they ate as much as they cared to and gave some food to the redcoats.

When at last evening came, they took the red coats off the British soldiers and the garments were donned by Dick and Bob.

The two fellows protested, but it did no good.

They understood what this move portended.

They realized that Dick and Bob intended entering the British encampment.

"You had better not do it!" said the fellow who had been addressed as Hampton by his companion. "You are going to sure death, if you go into our camp to-night."

"Why so?" asked Dick, calmly.

"Why?"

"Yes; why?"

"It is very simple. You were in our camp the other night, were you not?"

"Yes."

"And your presence was discovered?"

"It was."

"And you had to flee for your life."

"True. I escaped, however, as you are doubtless aware."

"Yes; but you can't hope to escape always."

"No, I suppose not."

"And if you venture into the camp to-night you won't escape."

"Why not escape to-night as well as any other time?"

"On account of the fact that our boys are keeping a sharper lookout than they ever have before."

"Oh, that's it!"

"Yes."

"Thank you," said Dick. "It is very kind of you to give me this information."

"I suppose you don't believe me," the fellow said.

"I didn't say so."

"But you think so."

"Perhaps."

"All right! You'll find there is no perhaps about it, if you venture down into the camp to-night."

"You think so?"

"I do!"

"Very well, we are going to venture down into your camp, just the same!"

"You'll be captured!"

"We'll risk it."

"You'll be shot as spies!"

"We'll risk that, too," said Dick, calmly.

The fellow saw he could have no effect on Dick, and subsided.

Had he known Dick better, he would have saved his breath in the first place, and made no attempt to frighten the youths from their purpose of venturing into the British camp.

Dick was not the kind of a youth to be frightened by words.

Calling Mr. Hardy outside of the cabin, Dick asked him if he would remain and guard the prisoners.

"Certainly, Dick," was the reply. "I'll stay here as long as you want me to."

"Very well; I will wish you to stay here and guard the prisoners until I return safely from among the British. That may be a day or two. Bob, however, will be back some time to-night, if all goes well; and he will divide the time with you in keeping guard."

"All right, Dick."

The youths shook hands with Mr. Hardy and took their departure.

"A couple of brave and noble youths," murmured Mr. Hardy, as the youths disappeared in the darkness. "They are going upon an exceedingly dangerous expedition, but they seem to have no fear. I don't believe they know the meaning of the word."

CHAPTER IV.

INTO THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

Dick and Bob made their way through the timber.

They moved as rapidly as was possible under the circumstances.

The night was dark.

The timber through which they were going was heavy.

There was also considerable underbrush.

They had to practically feel their way.

So their progress could not be very rapid.

But then they had not far to go.

They had plenty of time at their command.

There was no necessity for haste.

They would reach the British camp in plenty of time for their purpose, anyway.

There was some danger that they might get lost, however.

Dick realized this and was very careful.

It would not do to get lost.

Dick and Bob were both used to the timber, however, so the danger of their getting lost was not so great as it would have been with persons not used to the timber.

They went a little bit out of their way, but finally reached the top of the hill where they had captured the red-coats that morning.

They saw the campfires blazing on the shore, and could see the British soldiers moving about in the fitful glare of light thrown up by the fires.

Farther on, beyond the campfires, could be seen scores of slightly swaying red lights.

These were made by lanterns hanging at the bows and sterns of the warships in New York Bay.

The youths remained at the top of the hill but a few moments.

Then they left their position and made their way slowly down the hillside.

Soon they reached the mouth of the ravine which extended almost down to the British encampment.

They entered the mouth of the ravine and moved slowly and carefully downward.

As they neared the lower end of the ravine, they became even more cautious.

It was possible that there would be sentinels stationed there.

The youths did not wish to be discovered.

As they drew nearer they heard the sound of voices.

"Sentinels!" whispered Bob.

"Yes," whispered Dick; "we shall have to be very careful."

They approached nearer the point from which came the sound of the voices.

They moved very slowly.

They exercised the utmost care.

As they neared the end of the ravine, the forms of two sentinels were distinguishable, being outlined against the faint light background made by the blazing campfires.

When within perhaps fifteen yards of the sentinels, the youths paused.

The sentinels were directly in their path.

It would be impossible to get past them without being discovered.

The youths realized this, and were puzzled to know what to do.

Then a thought struck Dick.

The sentinels probably had beats leading away from the mouth of the ravine to the right and to the left.

They had doubtless come together there, and after talking awhile would move away on their beats again.

In that case all the youths would have to do would be to wait.

So they decided to do this.

They sat down and took it as easy as possible.

The conversation of the redcoat sentinels was regarding matters that did not interest Dick and Bob.

So they learned nothing of value by listening.

The youths wished that the two would get through talking and go away on their beats, however.

They were anxious to get to work.

They were eager to get down into the camp and see if they could learn anything of importance.

Presently their wish was gratified.

The sentinels got through talking and moved away, one going to the right, the other to the left.

Probably they feared the officer of the guard might appear and find them talking instead of attending to their duties.

"Now we will be all right," whispered Dick; "we will slip through while they are away, with their backs toward us."

The youths waited only a few moments.

Then they rose to their feet.

They stole silently forward.

When they reached the entrance of the ravine, they paused and looked to see where the sentinels were.

The two were twenty yards away, to the right and to the left, and were walking slowly away.

Their backs were toward the youths.

"They won't see us," whispered Dick; "come on!"

The two stole forward.

They moved quickly but silently.

They went on their tip-toes, and half-walked, half-ran. When they had traversed half the distance between the mouth of the ravine and the encampment, they slowed down and walked at a moderate pace.

They did not think the sentinels would notice them now; or if they did, they would think nothing of it, simply thinking the two belonged there.

Neither did they wish to attract undue attention by entering the British encampment hurriedly.

This would be almost sure to arouse suspicion.

What ever they did now, must be done in a moderate, calm and sedate manner.

They would have to act, as nearly as they could, exactly as the British soldiers were acting.

The soldiers were engaged in various pastimes.

Many were seated about the campfires, while many more were walking slowly here and there, pausing to look on at a game of cards, or to listen to some story being spun by one of their comrades.

Some were singing—rollicking war songs.

Here and there a redcoat was dancing a jig, to the music of a french-harp, or perhaps to the whistling of a comrade.

It was rather a lively and inspiriting scene.

But the patriot youths did not enjoy it.

They were thinking of other things.

They had come here on business of importance, and could not take time to think of anything else.

They moved here and there after entering the encampment, and wherever they came upon a group of the redcoats they paused and listened to the conversation.

If the conversation was of a nature that did not prove of interest, they moved onward at once.

They did not go near the point where the soldiers were singing or dancing jigs.

They were seeking for information.

The youths played their parts to perfection.

There was nothing in their actions to arouse the least suspicion.

Their coats and headgear were exactly like those worn by the British soldiers, so there was no reason why their identity should be suspected.

In an army of eighteen thousand men, any one man could not be expected to be personally acquainted with more than a few, these few being members of his own company and regiment.

At nightfall, however, when in camp, the soldiers moved here and there throughout the encampment at their pleasure.

It gave them something to do and furnished them amusement and helped pass the time away.

This made it easy for Dick and Bob.

They could walk everywhere and attract no especial attention.

They picked up several items of information.

Presently they came to a group, the members of which were discussing the very subject which the youths wished to hear discussed.

The subject in question was that of the British army going aboard the warships.

The soldiers seemed to be as puzzled regarding the meaning of this movement as had been Murdock and Hampton, the two prisoners the youths had made that morning.

One thing Dick heard them say pleased him greatly.

The statement was to the effect that their company was one of those chosen to go aboard Admiral Howe's flagship.

Dick made up his mind that he would go with this company.

He was confident that Generals Howe and Cornwallis and the members of their staff would go aboard this ship as they would have to confer with Admiral Howe frequently.

Therefore if he was to learn anything of value regarding

the intended movements of the British, it would be necessary for him to be on board this ship.

And Dick was determined to learn something definite before returning to Morristown to report to the commander-in-chief.

He knew how eagerly Washington desired definite information, how important it was that he should have it, and he was determined to secure it if such a thing was possible.

He knew that the fact that the British army had gone aboard the warship would be a surprise to General Washington.

More, the move would be a very puzzling one.

The knowledge that they had gone aboard the ship would not be of much use to him; he must know why they had done so.

So Dick had already made his plans.

He would send Bob back to join Mr. Hardy.

Then he would go aboard the warship and spy upon Generals Howe and Cornwallis.

This would be very dangerous work.

Once on board the warship his position would be one of great danger.

It would be a very difficult matter to avoid having his identity discovered.

The discovery would be fatal.

It would be the same as a death warrant.

Dick realized this, but it had no effect upon him.

To succeed as a spy, one must not think of risks or danger to himself.

To secure information, it was necessary to penetrate to the quarters occupied by the highest officers.

This, of course, could not be otherwise than exceedingly dangerous.

But, as we have said, Dick gave this matter no thought.

The youths put in a couple of hours walking here and there, listening to the conversation of first one and then another of the groups of British soldiers.

Then Dick and Bob worked their way out of the encampment.

They succeeded in getting back into the mouth of the ravine without being seen by the sentinels.

They moved slowly up the ravine and had gone perhaps twenty yards when they were treated to a sudden and startling surprise.

They felt themselves seized by strong hands, and before they could do anything to prevent it, they were thrown to the ground with considerable force.

"It's our turn, my bold rebel youths!" hissed a voice in Dick's ear. "We've got you dead to rights, this time!"

CHAPTER V.

A BATTLE ROYAL.

Dick understood the affair instantly.

The persons who had seized himself and Bob were Murdock and Hampton, the men whom they had left prisoners in the old cabin.

In some manner they had escaped.

Just how they had accomplished it, Dick could not guess.

And there was no time for conjecture.

He had something else to do.

If he and Bob escaped capture, they would have to do some lively fighting.

They had been taken at a disadvantage.

Moreover, the two redcoats were both strong and powerful fellows.

Then, too, they were no doubt eager to get even with Dick and Bob for having made them prisoners.

"We mustn't let them capture us, Bob," said Dick. "Give it to them!"

"That's what I'm doing, Dick!" panted Bob.

Then a terrible struggle ensued there in that dark and lonely defile.

It was a battle royal.

Not another word was spoken.

They saved their breath for the work in which they were engaged.

The redcoats worked fiercely and energetically.

They were determined to make the youths prisoners.

The youths were as determined that they should not do so.

Dick and Bob fought fully as fiercely and determinedly as did the redcoats.

It was the activity, suppleness, strength and endurance of youth against the matured strength of manhood.

In a brief encounter where strength was the main requisite, the redcoats might have triumphed.

This was not a contest of that kind, however.

They were unable to overpower the youths quickly.

The longer the struggle lasted, the poorer grew their chances of overcoming the youths at all.

They were rapidly becoming winded, while Dick and Bob seemed as fresh as ever.

The result was that the order of things became reversed. The redcoats, from being on the offensive, had to change their tactics and take the defensive.

Dick and Bob were now the aggressors.

They worked fiercely and energetically.

They were determined to recapture the two redcoats possible.

And they would no doubt have done so had they been let alone.

But this was not to be.

There came an interruption.

The thing that Dick feared might happen, did happen.

The two sentinels meeting at the ends of their beat where they came together at the mouth of the ravine, heard the sounds of the conflict.

"Hello! I wonder what's going on in there!" cried one.

"I don't know," replied the other. "We had better see though; it's a struggle of some kind."

Dick and Bob heard the sentinel's words.

So did the two redcoats.

They understood that help was at hand, and they hoped that they might yet succeed in making prisoners of the youths.

"This way, soldiers of the king!" cried one in a loud voice. "Come quickly, and help capture a couple of rebels!"

Sounds of excited exclamations were heard.

Then came hurrying footsteps.

Dick and Bob realized that they were in great danger now.

While they might and undoubtedly would have triumphed over the two redcoats and recaptured them, they could not hope to be successful against four of them.

They would have to give up the idea of recapturing the two redcoats.

They would have to turn their entire attention to the matter of making their escape.

They would have to act quickly.

The sentinels would be upon the scene in a few moments.

The youths realized that they would have to break loose from the two redcoats and make their escape before the sentinels reached them.

If they delayed too long they would be unable to escape at all.

So the instant he heard the sound of hurrying footsteps, Dick cried out:

"Break loose, Bob! Break loose and run with all your might!"

"All right, Dick!" came in grim tones from Bob.

"No, you don't!" cried one of the redcoats. "We'll hold you till our friends get here! You can't get away!"

But the redcoat was wrong.

The youths were desperate.

They quickly proved that they could get away.

They proved it by doing it.

Thud, thud! Thud, thud!

Dick and Bob struck the two redcoats fierce blows with their fists.

They followed this up with sudden, fierce wrenches of their bodies.

The blows from the fists pained and disconcerted the redcoats and caused them to loosen their holds upon the youths.

The result was that, when the youths gave the strong wrenches they succeeded in breaking loose from their opponents.

They were only just in time.

The sentinels were almost upon them.

Dick and Bob leaped away and ran up the ravine as fast as they could.

Cries and curses went up from the two redcoats.

They were very angry, and greatly disappointed on account of their failure to hold the youths until the sentinels could reach them.

"Stop!" cried one, in a loud, fierce voice. "Halt! or we will fire!"

But Dick and Bob had no intention of halting.

They had been fired upon too often to be stopped by such a threat.

"Fire, and be hanged to you!" said Bob in a grim undertone. "You couldn't hit the side of a barn at ten paces, anyway, in broad daylight!"

"But accidents sometimes happen, you know, Bob," said Dick.

"True; and it certainly would be an accident if they hit us."

Crack, crack!

The redcoats had drawn their pistols and fired.

The sounds of the shots was the only intimation the youths had of the fact, however.

They did not hear any sound of the bullets.

"The sentinels will fire their muskets next," said Dick, "perhaps they may do better—or worse, rather, so far as we are concerned."

"I hope not, Dick. I guess there isn't much danger."

The youths ran onward up the ravine.

Crack, crack!

The sentinels had fired a couple of musket shots.

Their shots came nearer the mark.

The youths heard the bullets whistle.

"That was pretty close!" said Bob. "But they missed us; so the closeness of it doesn't make any difference."

"True. Well, I hope we will be able to get clear away before they can fire upon us again. They might hit us next time."

The youths ran onward up the ravine as swiftly as they could go.

They knew by the sound of the voices of the redcoats that the fellows were coming in pursuit.

The youths felt confident, however, that their pursuers were no match for them in speed.

They were sure they could run away from the redcoats.

And they were determined to do it in the shortest possible space of time.

To that end they exerted themselves and put on an extra burst of speed.

They drew away from their pursuers.

They knew this because of the fact that the sound of the redcoats' voices grew fainter and fainter.

Presently the youths reached the upper end of the ravine.

They did not pause here.

They kept on, and a few moments later were at the top of the hill.

They looked back down the ravine, but could neither hear nor see the redcoats who had been pursuing them.

"I guess we have distanced them, Bob," said Dick.

"Yes; but, great guns, Dick, look down in the encampment yonder! Looks like a hornet's nest after a boy has stuck a stick in it, don't it!"

"The shots aroused them, Bob."

"That's right; I guess they think the entire patriot army is coming down upon them."

"The shooting has aroused them, at any rate."

"Do you suppose they will follow us up here?"

"I don't know, Bob; there's one thing that I do know, though."

"What is that?"

"That, for fear those four redcoats do follow us, it is important that we hasten to the old cabin where we left the two prisoners. It may be that they made a prisoner of Mr. Hardy, and in that case we must reach there ahead of them and release him."

"That's so, Dick; but, do you know, I don't believe they made a prisoner of him."

"What makes you think so, Bob?"

"Why, if they had made a prisoner of him, I think they

would have brought him with them. They would not have left him behind, would they?"

"They might have done so, intending to return and get him later on. You see, they knew we were down in the British encampment, passing ourselves off as redcoats. By hastening back to the encampment, they might reach there in time to expose us and accomplish our capture. Then, of course, they could return at their leisure and get Mr. Hardy."

"That's right; I hadn't thought of that."

"Come, then. Let's hurry."

"Away we go, Dick!"

The two struck out and made their way as rapidly as possible in the direction of the old cabin in the woods.

It did not take them more than five minutes to reach the cabin.

The door was open.

It was as dark inside the cabin as it was out of doors.

They could just see that the door was open, and that was all.

They leaped through the doorway into the cabin.

"Mr. Hardy, are you here?" called Dick.

There was no reply in words; but a stifled groan came to their hearing.

"He is here, and a prisoner!" exclaimed Dick; and he leaped across the room in the direction from which the sound had come.

He stooped over and felt about on the floor.

His hands came in contact with a human form.

A quick examination, by means of feeling about with his hands, revealed to Dick the fact that Mr. Hardy was bound hand and foot and gagged.

"Is he there, Dick?" asked Bob.

"Yes; I've found him. You listen for the redcoats while I free him."

"All right; and if the redcoats put in an appearance, I will shoot holes into one or two of them."

Dick quickly drew a knife.

He had to work carefully in the darkness to keep from cutting Mr. Hardy with the knife, but soon succeeded in cutting the bonds and removing the gag.

"Ah! it feels good to be free once more!" said Mr. Hardy. "I am glad you got here so soon."

"I believe I hear the redcoats coming, Dick!" said Bob in a low tone.

"We must be getting out of here in a hurry, then," said Dick. "There are only four of them, still, I do not think it will be wise to stay here and fight them. One or more of us might be killed or badly wounded, and that would be

bad indeed; besides I do not believe in bloodshed, save in battle and on other occasions when it cannot possibly be avoided."

Dick was leading the way out of the cabin as he was talking.

The noise made by the approaching redcoats could be plainly heard now.

They were close at hand.

"We'll step aside into the timber a little ways," said Dick, "and see what they have to say when they find we have beaten them."

The three stepped aside a distance of ten yards, and stationed themselves behind some trees, and awaited the approach of the redcoats.

They had not long to wait.

The redcoats soon reached the cabin.

The three could not see them, but could hear them plainly.

The redcoats were puffing and blowing at a great rate. They were evidently almost exhausted.

"Wait here a moment, fellows!" Dick heard a voice which he recognized as being that of Murdock, say; "I'll go in and see if the prisoner is still there."

"Go in and 'feel' if he is still there, you mean, Murdock," said the voice of Hampton. "It is so dark a fellow could slice it with a knife."

Almost immediately afterward an exclamation came from the interior of the cabin.

"He's gone!" came in Murdock's voice. "Those curse young rebels beat us here after all, and set him free!"

"I thought you would find it that way, Murdock," said Hampton. "Those two are a couple of the liveliest youngsters I ever had anything to do with. Jove! my jaw feel like it was broken where one of them hit me during the mix-up down in the ravine."

"I judge that I shall carry a black eye for a few days," said Murdock in a lugubrious tone of voice. "I'd like to get a crack at the one that hit me, to get even."

"I'd like to get two cracks at the one who hit me," grumbled Hampton; "but I guess there's no chance of doing it to-night. They've escaped us this time sure."

"Yes, they've got away into the timber," agreed Murdock; "and it would be like hunting for a needle in a haystack to try to find them. They might be within thirty feet of us and yet be perfectly safe from discovery."

The redcoat stated the exact truth without knowing it.

Dick, Bob, and Mr. Hardy were not more than thirty feet distance at that moment.

The redcoats talked for a few moments longer, and then took their departure.

They talked as if they intended returning to the British encampment at once, and Dick and his companions saw no reason for doubting that they really intended doing so.

It would be utter folly for the redcoats to try to find the three patriots in the darkness.

And the redcoats, not being fools, would not attempt it.

Soon the redcoats were out of hearing.

Then the three emerged from their hiding-place, and paused in front of the cabin.

"The escape of those two redcoats and their return to the encampment has upset my calculations," said Dick. "They will tell about our having been in the encampment and the soldiers will be excited and aroused; it will be impossible for me to follow out my original plan of remaining among the British and going aboard one of the warships to-morrow. My identity would surely be discovered. I shall have to try and think up some other plan, for I have made up my mind to go on board Admiral Howe's flagship. If I can't do it one way, I will another!"

There was grim determination in Dick's tone, proving that he meant every word he uttered.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK INTERFERES IN BEHALF OF SOME SAILORS.

Dick was in a quandary.

He did not know what to do.

It looked as though he was going to be balked in his purpose of going aboard the warship in spite of himself.

But he had not given up hope.

His quick mind was working rapidly.

He was struck with an idea.

He knew considerable regarding the tastes and habits of sailors.

He was aware that the sailors from the warships made a practice of going over to New York City every night and remaining until late, drinking and carousing.

He made up his mind to go over to New York City.

He would visit the haunts patronized by the sailors.

By so doing, he might manage in some way, through their aid, to get aboard Admiral Howe's flagship.

Of course, it was impossible to formulate any definite plan.

This was not necessary, however.

He could form his plan after reaching New York.

"How far is it from here to the nearest point where I can secure a boat, Mr. Hardy?" asked Dick.

"About a mile, Dick," was the reply.

"Good!" the youth exclaimed. "Let us hasten there at once."

"What are you going to do with a boat, Dick?" asked Bob.

"Going to ride in it, Bob."

"Where to?"

"Over to the city."

"Over to the city?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do over there?"

"What I do over there will be governed by circumstances. I think that I may stand a chance of getting aboard Admiral Howe's flagship by going over to the city and mingling with the sailors."

"Am I to go along, Dick?"

"No, Bob."

"Why not?"

"I think it will be better for you not to go."

"I don't see why."

"Well, it's this way, Bob: If I do manage to get aboard Admiral Howe's flagship, I will be in great danger of being detected and captured. If you were along, you would be captured also. You, by remaining behind, would then be enabled to return to Morristown with the information we have already secured."

"I guess you're right, Dick. But, great guns! whatever you do, don't let those redcoats nab you."

"I won't let them nab me if I can help it, you may be sure of that, Bob."

The three now set out through the timber and darkness.

Mr. Hardy went in advance.

He knew the way, while they did not.

A walk of fifteen or twenty minutes brought them to the strip of water separating Staten Island and New Jersey.

The boat was found where Mr. Hardy had left it.

Dick gave Bob his final instructions.

"You remain at Mr. Hardy's two days, Bob," he said. "And if I have not returned by that time, you must go back to Morristown and place the commander-in-chief in possession of all the information that has been secured."

"All right, Dick," replied Bob; "but I want you to be back! I don't want to have to return to Morristown by myself."

"I'll be back with you, Bob, if such a thing is possible."

"Well, be careful, old man!"

"I will, Bob."

Then Dick shook hands with Bob and Mr. Hardy and climbed into the boat.

He seated himself and unshipped the oars.

Mr. Hardy pushed the boat off.

Dick placed the oars in the rowlocks and began rowing silently away.

"Good-by!" he called out.

"Good-by, and good luck to you!" cried Bob and Mr. Hardy.

It was about twelve miles from Dick's starting point to the city.

It would take him from an hour and a half to an hour and three-quarters to row there.

He made regular, steady strokes with the oar, and forced the boat through the water at a good rate of speed.

He was soon in New York Bay proper.

He could see the lanterns hanging at the bows and sterns of the warships, and this enabled him to keep clear of the vessels.

Away beyond he saw the lights of New York City.

They were very faint.

They consisted of perhaps half a dozen whale-oil lamps placed here and there about Bowling Green.

These, of course, did not make a great illumination, but it was sufficient to mark the spot, and sufficed as a guide for Dick.

The youth kept well away from the warships.

He kept as much space between them and himself as he could without going too much out of his way.

He did not wish to attract the attention of a watchman, and cause an alarm to be raised.

At last Dick reached New York.

Leaping ashore at one of the wharfs he made the boat fast and then made his way across Bowling Green.

Dick knew that the sailors frequented the saloons and drinking houses near the water front.

The sailors did not believe in getting any further away from the water than was necessary.

Dick paused in front of the first saloon he came to.

"I dislike entering such a place," the youth thought; "but it is necessary if I am to accomplish anything, so here goes!"

Dick pushed the door open and entered.

The scene which met his gaze was about what he had expected to see.

The room was well filled.

There were British soldiers in all the brilliancy of their scarlet uniforms; others still had on uniforms of the British navy; still others had on the garb of ordinary sailor before the mast; and in addition to all the others were some dressed in ordinary citizen's clothes.

Notwithstanding the diversity of their dress, all were engaged in the same pursuit—drinking.

Some were half, some two-thirds, and others wholly drunk, while a few—a very few—were seemingly quite sober.

These latter, Dick shrewdly guessed, were shore sharks who made a business of frequenting the dramshops patronized by the sailors, and robbing them after they became drunk.

Dick would have preferred not to attract attention.

It would have suited him to stand quietly at one side listening to the conversation of the sailors, and in this manner find one or more who belonged on board Admiral Howe's flagship.

But he found that this would not do.

It would attract too much attention to him.

If he was to remain in the place unmolested, he would have to do as the others were doing.

It would not do to stand around.

He had not much more than got inside before he was addressed by one of the British soldiers.

Dick still wore the British uniform, and this no doubt attracted the fellow's attention.

"Hello, ol' fel'!" the redcoat said in a thick tone; "co up'n have a drink with me. Lesh be soshable an' fren'ly

Dick was afraid that the redcoat might take offense if he refused, so he stepped up to the bar.

"All right, comrade," he said; "I'll drink with you."

The redcoat ordered drinks for two, and the barkeep quickly placed two glasses and a bottle before them.

The redcoat managed to pour the liquor into the glass. Then he lifted his glass, Dick doing likewise.

"Heresh luck t' King George an' th' Britchshish army 'Merica!" said the British soldier in a maudlin tone.

"I never drink liquor of any kind," thought Dick himself; "but if I did, I would not drink it to such a to as that!"

He did not wish to raise a disturbance, however; so, much as he felt like tossing the liquor in the redcoat's face, a telling him what he thought of King George and all representatives in America, Dick restrained himself.

This was a case where silence was the best policy.

So Dick touched to his lips in a pretense of drinking, and then as the other threw his head back and swallowed his liquor, Dick, with a dexterous flirt of the glass, threw the liquor on the floor.

His action was unnoticed.

The redcoat who had insisted on treating was well satisfied and insisted on shaking hands with Dick, and assuring him of his undying friendship.

Dick submitted to this with as good a grace as possible, and then got away from the fellow and made his way over to a table in one corner of the room.

Four sailors were seated about this table.

They were about two-thirds drunk.

They were talking loudly.

Dick listened to their conversation with interest.

He hoped to hear them mention the name of the vessel aboard which they belonged.

His wishes in this respect were gratified.

The sailors presently mentioned the name of the vessel from which they had come.

Dick's heart leaped for joy.

The name mentioned was that of the flagship of Admiral Howe.

Dick made up his mind that he would not lose sight of these four sailors.

He might be able through their assistance to get aboard the ship.

He did not know how it was to be accomplished.

He would have to pursue such a course as circumstances made necessary.

For the present he would have to lie low and keep watch on the four sailors.

Something might turn up that would aid him in his undertaking.

He would simply hold himself in readiness to take advantage of any opportunity which might present itself.

The sailors kept on drinking, and, as a natural result, grew more and more intoxicated.

They were soon far enough gone in this respect as to attract the attention of two or three of the shore sharks already mentioned—the scoundrels who made their living by stealing from the sailors.

Those fellows drew near the table and became very friendly with the drunken sailors.

Dick was watching the fellows.

He understood their purpose.

He made up his mind to checkmate the scoundrels.

As soon as they made a positive move toward robbing the sailors, he would interfere.

It might be the chance that he was looking for.

If the sailors were not too drunk to be appreciative, it would enable him to make friends with them.

Ordinarily, there is no class of men who appreciate a favor shown them or a kindness done them, or who are more grateful for such, than are sailors.

Dick was aware of this.

So he was willing to render the sailors such aid and assistance as was in his power, and risk their being grateful.

He watched the would-be thieves closely.

He was confident that they would not long delay making the attempt to possess themselves of such money as the sailors possessed.

Nor was he mistaken.

Suddenly he saw one of the would-be thieves insert his hand in the pocket of one of the sailors.

This was Dick's cue to act.

Leaping forward, he seized the fellow by the coat collar and gave him a strong jerk.

The would-be thief, in order to save himself, seized the back of the chair in which the sailor was seated.

This did not save him, however.

Dick had put forth all his strength.

Down came the would-be thief, flat upon his back on the floor.

He held on to the chair, however, with the result that he pulled it and its occupant over on top of himself.

The three, thief, sailor, and chair, came down with a terrible crash.

Instantly all was confusion.

"We'll fix you for that!" cried one of the comrades of the would-be thief, and three of the fellows leaped forward to attack Dick.

CHAPTER VII.

ON BOARD THE WARSHIP.

The scoundrels meant business.

Dick realized this.

It did not daunt him, however.

He meant business himself.

He was ready for them.

And was willing to meet them at least half way.

Doubtless the three fellows thought they would have no trouble in disposing of one.

They were so confident of this that they were careless. They did not think it necessary to be on their guard. The result was that they were treated to a surprise.

Out shot Dick's right arm, then his left.

His fists took two of the fellows fairly between the eyes.

They were knocked down as effectively as though they had been struck with sledge-hammers.

They struck the floor with a crash.

Then, crack! Dick's fist took the other fellow under the chin.

The scoundrel was lifted off his feet, and went down with terrible force.

He alighted fairly on top of one of his comrades who had just started to try to regain his feet.

This eased the third man's fall, but it was hard on his comrade.

The fellow was flattened out, and the breath was totally and almost permanently knocked out of him.

There were two or three more of the fellows in the room, and giving utterance to cries of anger, they rushed at Dick.

By this time the soldiers with whom Dick had pretended to take a drink came to an understanding of the situation.

"Harold Mort'mer t' th' rescue!" exclaimed the half-drunken redcoat. "Young fellerzh fr'en' v mine, an' I'll protect'm with m' life, thash whash I'll do!"

Then the redcoat came to Dick's assistance.

One would not have thought that a drunken man would have been able to render much aid in a case of this kind.

But this proved to be an exception.

The sight of the combat and the thought that he was going to take a hand in it seemed to sober the redcoat up wonderfully.

The result was that he knocked two of the fellows down before Dick could get a chance at them.

At almost the same instant, however, Dick floored the other one.

"'Rah for King George and the king's soldiers!" the redcoat cried, enthusiastically; "they're the boys who can do the business all ri'!"

And now ensued a general mix-up.

The sailor who had been pulled over onto the floor, and the fellow who had pulled him over, were engaged in a fierce fight, and now the other three sailors took a hand in the affair.

It was Dick and his redcoat friend and the four sailors against seven rascally thieves.

The latter fought fiercely.

They were desperadoes at heart.

They tried to draw and use weapons.

One did succeed in drawing a knife, and would have stabbed the redcoat had not Dick seen his action and prevented it.

Dick seized the fellow's wrist just in time and gave it a terrible twisting wrench, almost breaking it.

The fellow gave utterance to a cry of pain and dropped the knife.

Then with a blow straight from the shoulder Dick felled the rascal to the floor.

Becoming engaged in a scrimmage quickly sobered the sailors.

This made it possible for them to fight effectively.

Dick and his friends were outnumbered to the extent of one man, but this odds was not sufficient to have any effect upon the result of the encounter.

The truth was that Dick himself was equal to at least three of their opponents, and the result of the combat did not remain long in doubt.

The gang of would-be thieves were soon thoroughly whipped, and suddenly they quit fighting and darted out of doors.

The four sailors and the half-drunk redcoat were delighted.

They were greatly elated over their victory.

They shook hands with one another and with Dick and congratulated one another on their success in putting the fellows to flight.

They called for liquor and proceeded to celebrate.

Even if Dick had not wished to do so he could not have helped being chummy with the sailors and redcoats.

The sailors had not been so drunk but what they knew the youth had interfered in their behalf and saved them from being robbed.

The result was that they would hear to nothing else than that Dick should remain there and celebrate with them.

This suited Dick exactly.

It was just what he desired.

Of course he did not wish to, nor did he intend to drink any liquor, but he was confident that it would not be difficult to make pretense of drinking and get rid of the liquor by throwing it on the floor.

The drunker they got the better it would be for his plan. And a plan was gradually taking shape in his mind.

It was already partially mapped out.

He had made up his mind to stay with the sailors until they should start to return to their vessel.

Then he would accompany them.

If possible he would go aboard the ship with them.

And he thought it would be possible to do so.

In fact he was determined to accomplish it.

On the morrow Generals Howe and Cornwallis would go aboard Admiral Howe's flagship.

In order to secure definite information regarding the future movements of the British it would be absolutely necessary to go aboard the ship.

No better opportunity could possibly present itself than the present.

Dick felt sure of this.

Therefore he was determined to embrace the opportunity.

He would make the most of it.

Consequently he was glad of the fact that it was so easy to remain in the company of the sailors.

During the next hour the four sailors and the redcoat disposed of a great quantity of liquor.

Dick pretended to drink as much as any of them.

But he did not drink any.

Their minds were on other things and they had no eyes or anything save their wine glasses.

So it was an easy matter for Dick to pour his share of liquor on the floor.

At last the sailors were ready to go.

They were about as drunk as it was possible for even a sailor to get.

Dick's redcoat friend was almost as drunk as it was possible for him to get.

He protested in maudlin tones when Dick started to leave in company with the sailors, but gave in gracefully when Dick told him that he positively had to go.

"Allri' ol' fel'," he said; "if y' haf t' go, y' haf t' G'-by!"

So Dick got out of the saloon in company with the sailors.

One thing bothered the youth.

He was afraid the sailors would not know the way back to their boat.

But he need not have feared.

Drunk as they were—and they were so drunk that they could hardly stand up—the matter of finding their boat seemed to present no difficulties to them.

They made their way across Bowling Green.

They traveled farther than was necessary, of course, as they zigzagged here and there and were forced to tack frequently, but finally they reached the pier.

A flickering whale oil lamp on a lamp post a short distance away showed a boat lying at the foot of the pier.

Dick did not think it possible that these drunken sailors could get into the boat without falling into the water.

But they fooled him again.

They were more at home in boats and about the water than they were on shore.

Dick stood ready to render assistance should any be needed, but it was not.

The sailors got into the boat unaided and without much difficulty.

Then Dick got in after them.

He did it in the most matter of fact manner imaginable. The sailors offered no objections.

In fact they seemed to think it was the proper thing to do.

They looked upon Dick as a comrade and seemed glad to have him with them.

To their drink-dulled minds there was no reason why he should not accompany them.

They would have been disappointed had he not entered the boat.

They looked upon him as a hale fellow well met and wished to keep him with them.

Dick cast off the painter and pushed the boat away from the pier.

Three of the sailors took the oars while the fourth seated himself at the stern and took the steering oar.

The three began rowing.

Their strokes were unsteady and none too strong, but the boat moved through the water at a fair rate of speed.

Dick wondered if the sailors would be able to find their ship.

They had found their way to the boat, true, but could they find the ship amid the deep darkness.

This was a question.

The only way he could get an answer to it was by waiting.

The matter would soon be decided.

Dick hoped the sailors would have no trouble in finding the ship.

He himself did not know its location.

So he could render them no assistance in the matter. But again Dick's fears were unfounded.

The sailors seemed to know by instinct which way to go.

After fifteen minutes of rowing, the boat was brought to a standstill under the stern of a large vessel.

Dick was reassured.

He had no doubt that this was Admiral Howe's flagship. The watchman at the stern of the warship had not hailed the occupants of the boat.

Doubtless he knew who they were.

He simply leaned over the rail for a moment, glanced down, said, "They're back at last, and drunker than lords," and then turned and walked away.

Dick had feared the watchman would notice him and become suspicious, but the fellow did not seem to pay any attention to him.

"Now, if I can only get aboard and into the forecastle in company with these sailors!" thought Dick, "I will be all right."

A rope ladder hung down from the ship.

Dick made the painter fast to this ladder, tying it up short so that the boat's head would remain right at the ladder.

Then he climbed boldly up and over the ship's rail.

The sailors followed one at a time and scrambled over the rail.

Much to Dick's satisfaction, the watchman was half-way up the deck of the ship on his beat.

When the four sailors were all on deck, they made their way toward the bow of the vessel, where the forecastle was situated.

Dick accompanied them.

He simulated drunkenness, and with very good success.

Drunk as they were, the sailors noticed Dick's change of demeanor.

"Ye're (hic) b'ginnin' t' get drunk, too, (hic) are ye, shipmate?" remarked one.

The others seemed to think it was a good joke and pounded Dick lovingly on the shoulder and in the back.

"We're all (hic) drunk t'gether," said another; "an' we won' go home till mornin'!"

The watchman saw and heard them, but paid no attention other than to chuckle to himself.

"That's a happy crowd," he murmured; "but oh, what heads they'll have to-morrow!"

Doubtless the watchman had been there himself on more than one occasion, and knew all about it.

Finally Dick and the four sailors reached the forecastle.

By some miracle the four sailors got down the forecastle companionway without falling down.

Dick kept close by them and accompanied them into the forecastle.

The four sailors lost no time in tumbling into their bunks.

A smoky lamp rested in a bracket at the farther end of the forecastle.

Dick was left to his own devices, but he was well satisfied to have it so.

He had been thinking while coming to the ship, and had thought out a course of procedure.

Dick was not afraid of awakening any of the sailors in the forecastle.

Sailors are proverbially sound sleepers.

So he made his way here and there in the most unconcerned and matter of fact manner.

He was hunting for an empty bunk, and he soon succeeded in finding one.

He climbed into the bunk, and, stretching himself out went to sleep.

This was one peculiarity of Dick's.

He was matter of fact in most things.

His nerves never gave him any trouble.

He never could see any use of worrying.

He had set out with the intention of getting aboard Admiral Howe's flagship.

He had succeeded.

This knowledge gave him great satisfaction.

Therefore, as there was nothing more that he could do that night, he, like the sensible youth that he was, decided to take some needed rest.

So, as we have said, he lay down and was soon asleep.

It seemed to Dick as if he had been asleep but a few minutes when he was awakened by feeling himself roughly shaken.

He opened his eyes and looked up to see the faces of half a dozen British tars.

There was, he imagined, a look of surprise and wonderment on their rugged, but on the whole, good-natured countenances.

"Well, mate," said one of the sailors; "it looks to me ez if ye've got inter the wrong pew!"

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK ACQUIRES SOME INFORMATION.

Dick was quick witted.

He had expected to wake up in some such situation as this when he went to sleep.

He had calculated on it, and had made up his mind regarding the course which he would pursue.

It all came back to him in an instant.

He looked up into the faces of the tars, blankly, and pretended to be amazed and puzzled.

For a few moments he gazed at the faces of the sailors, then he raised up on his elbow and looked all around.

"Where am I, anyway?" he asked in a wondering tone voice.

Dick's acting was good.

It deceived the sailors, at any rate.

"Don't you know?" asked one of them.

"No. Where am I?"

"You are on board one of his majesty's warships."

"On board a warship!"

Dick put all the surprise in his tone that he could.

"Yes."

"But—I don't understand it. How came I here?"

"That is for you to say. That is what we want to know."

"And it's what I'd like to know."

"It's funny if you don't know. You're one of the king's soldiers, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"And you belong in the British army over on Staten Island, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Then what are you doing here?"

Dick looked puzzled.

At any rate it was a clever imitation.

"I'm sure I don't—hold on!" Dick exclaimed. "Great Scott! I believe I do remember!"

Dick paused again and was silent for a few moments.

Then he arose to a sitting posture, and swung his legs over the edge of the bunk.

He scratched his head and looked at the floor in a perplexed manner.

"Yes, I have it now," he said; "I was over to New York last night having a little time. While I was in apon some rascals tried to rob some sailors. The sailors were pretty drunk and I remember now that I interfered. There were six or seven of the thieves and we had a lively fit there for a few minutes, the sailors—there were four of them—and another soldier joining in and helping me. I gave the rascals a good thrashing, and they took to their heels. Then the sailors insisted that we celebrate the victory, which we did. I guess we all got about as full as the allowance, and the only way I can account for my being here is that they must have brought me with them when they came off to the ship. I seem to remember leaving the boat with them, and that's about the last I do remember. If I remember aright, I believe they said they belonged on board Admiral Howe's flagship. Is this that sel?"

"Right, my hearty!" was the reply. "And I guess you've got it about right. Tom, Dick, Bob, and Bill, here,"

waving his hand toward some neighboring bunks from which came the sound of loud snoring, "were ashore last night having a time. They got full as geese—just listen to them snore—and it would be just like them to bring you aboard when they come. After you had he'ped 'em lick them thieves an' then you had all got drunk together, they'd love you like a brother and wouldn't think of leaving you behind. As I was sayin', it would be just like them to tote you off to the ship with them."

"I guess that must be it," said Dick. "I believe that if I saw the faces of the four sailors I was with last night, I would know them again. I'll take a look at these fellows here and see if they are the ones."

He rose to his feet and stepped across to the opposite bunk.

Of course he knew the fellows were the same, but it was necessary to keep on acting in order to deceive the others.

He looked at the face of the sailor lying in the bunk.

He gazed a few moments and then uttered an exclamation.

"It's one of them, sure enough!" he cried. "I'd know him anywhere."

"I thought you'd find it that way," said one of the sailors. "They couldn't think of leaving you behind after what you had done, so they brought you aboard with them."

"And have got me into a nice little scrape!" said Dick, lugubriously.

"Why so?"

"Why?"

"Yes, why?"

"It's very simple. It is past roll call time, and, as I did not show up in camp, I have no doubt been branded a deserter."

"Oh, that's it."

"Yes. And if I return now, I will probably be shot."

Of course, had Dick really been a British soldier and had he absented himself longer than he had been given leave to remain away, he would, had he gone back that morning, have been reprimanded, but he would have been in no danger of being shot.

The youth did not believe that those rough sailors would know the difference, however, and as it suited his purpose to remain on board the ship and he had to invent some excuse for doing so, he thought that this one of being accounted a deserter was as good an excuse as he could find. And so it proved.

The sailors did not know the difference.

They thought that what Dick said was true.

Sailors are as a general thing good-hearted men.

They felt sorry for Dick.

Their sympathies went out to him.

"What will you do?" asked one.

Dick shook his head slowly and looked puzzled.

"I hardly know," he replied. "I guess I shall have to lie low for awhile, and then become a deserter in fact. I am afraid, though, that they will capture me, no matter where I go. Jove! I don't know what to do!"

"I'll tell you what to do," said one of the old tars. "You do what I tell you to do and you will be all right."

"Let's hear what you have to suggest," said Dick.

He was well pleased.

He wished to remain on the ship, and to remain in the forecastle, his presence unsuspected by any of the officers of the ship or of the British army after the redcoats had come on board.

If he watched his corners, he felt sure of being able to acquire valuable information.

And now he felt confident the sailor was going to suggest the very thing that he wished to do.

It so proved.

"This is what I have to suggest," the old sailor said, earnestly; "you stay right here in the forecastle of this ship. We'll bring you your grub and you can keep out of sight. They'd never think of looking here for you."

"That's a good idea," said Dick; "and I shall adopt it if you fellows are willing. I thank you very much for suggesting it."

"Don't say a word," the old tar replied. "You got yourself into trouble by helping some of our boys when they wuz in trouble, an' we stan's by them as stan's by us; don't we, mates?"

"We do!" was the reply in a rousing chorus.

This suited Dick exactly.

Things could not possibly have been more to his liking.

He was soon on the best of terms with the sailors.

Dick suggested that some of the officers might come down in the forecastle, and that it would be a wise precaution for him to doff the soldier's uniform and put on a sailor's suit.

The sailors thought this was a good idea.

They all had extra suits, and one who was about Dick's size and build furnished Dick with the clothing.

Dick changed the clothing, and, rolling the soldier's uniform up, stuck it under the bunk.

Then he felt safer and more at ease.

When the four sailors with whom Dick had come on board the ship awoke, they corroborated everything Dick had said.

They had not doubted him before, but now they knew positively that he had told the truth.

The sailors, true to their promise, brought Dick some food.

He ate it and felt better.

He felt well in both mind and body.

He had good reason to congratulate himself.

In getting aboard the warship and managing to secure such a secure position as he now occupied was something which he might well be proud.

A little later on, the trampling of many feet was heard on deck.

"The soldiers are coming aboard," one of the sailors said to him.

Dick had already guessed that this was what it was.

"Jove! I'll have to lie low and keep close now," he said.

"That's right," was the reply. "Well, you don't need to show your head above deck if you don't want to."

"There is one thing, though," said Dick; "it may be that none of the members of my regiment have come aboard this ship. And if that is the case none of the soldiers would recognize me if they saw me, and having this sailor's uniform would make me still safer. They would think me one of the sailors."

"That's so."

"I'll take a peep after awhile and see," said Dick.

A few minutes later he slipped up the companionway and looked all around.

The sailors, of course, thought he was looking to see if any of the members of his regiment were on board.

This, however, was not Dick's purpose.

He wished to see if Generals Howe and Cornwallis had come aboard.

As Dick looked, his heart leaped with delight.

Halfway down the deck stood three men.

The three men were Admiral Howe and Generals Howe and Cornwallis.

They were talking earnestly and pointing here and there.

"I am all right!" thought Dick. "It will be queer if I do not acquire some valuable information while I am on this ship."

Dick remained in the companionway only a few minutes.

Then, fearing that he might attract attention, he went back down into the forecastle.

Dick put in the day doing nothing in particular. Indeed, there was nothing he could do.

He would not dare venture on deck in the daytime.

would have to wait until after nightfall to get in his was a long day to Dick.
e was used to action.
o be inactive, to sit still and do nothing, was the hard-work in the world for Dick.
e contented himself as best he could, however.
ith the coming of night he would get to work.
t noon and in the evening the sailors brought Dick food drink.
hey were doing their part as they had agreed.
e night came on Dick's spirits rose.
he time was coming when he could get to work.
nd he was never so happy as when at work.
ick was eager to be out and doing, but did not wish to all by undue haste.
he forced himself to remain quietly in the forecastle it was as dark as it would be that night.
hen when he thought the proper time had come, he said ie sailors:
I am going up on deck and get a little fresh air. I been cooped up here all day and feel the need of air exercise."
he sailors thought that this was all right, so had nothing to say against it.
ick left the forecastle and stole on deck.
e made his way softly across the deck.
e soon reached the door opening into the cabin.
e listened at the door for a few moments.
o sound came to his ears.
e took hold of the knob on the door and turned it.
hen he pushed against the door.
he door yielded and the youth pushed it slowly open.
he room was lighted by a whale oil lamp, and looking fully in, Dick saw that the room was not occupied.
Good!" he thought. "I'm glad of that!"
hen he stepped quickly into the room and closed the
r.
here was a window in each side of the cabin, but the shades were drawn down, so it would be impossible for the ichmen to see Dick through the windows, while walking kward and forward on their beats.
Dick walked softly across the room to where there wasoor opening into another room.
Dick bent over and placed his ear to the keyhole.
As he had hoped would be the case, he heard voices.
He listened eagerly.
To his great satisfaction he found that he could understand every word that was spoken.

"Good!" exclaimed Dick to himself after listening a few moments; "Admiral and Generals Howe and Cornwallis and their staff are in there and they are holding a council of war! Now, if I am not disturbed and forced to give up my position here, I shall certainly be successful in learning the plans of the British."

CHAPTER IX.

DICK LEARNS THE PLANS OF THE BRITISH.

"Well, now that you have got your men aboard my warships, what do you think of doing?" Dick heard one of the men say.

The speaker, as Dick knew, was Admiral Howe.

He was addressing his brother, General Howe.

"Well, I hardly know," was the reply in General Howe's voice. "I'll tell you what I have been thinking of doing, however."

"Well, what?"

"This: You know we tried to get across New Jersey and move on Philadelphia, but were kept from doing so by Washington's army."

"Yes, I know that."

"Well, I have been thinking of going to Philadelphia by water."

Dick heard exclamations escape several of the men.

"Oh, that is your idea, is it?" came in the admiral's voice. "You mean to go down the coast and up the Delaware Bay and River, do you?"

"Yes."

"But I understand there are a couple of forts just this side of Philadelphia guarding the approach by way of the river."

"So there are."

"Well, what about it; we couldn't get past without suffering considerable loss, could we?"

"No; but we wouldn't need to pass the forts in the ships."

"Ah, I understand! Your plan is to stop somewhere below the forts, land your army, and march to Philadelphia."

"Just so. Don't you think it feasible?"

"It looks feasible to me. What do you say, General Cornwallis?"

"I think it practicable," was the reply.

Then ensued quite a good deal of talk among the officers.

They discussed the matter pro and con for half an hour or so.

Luckily Dick was not disturbed.

He kept his position at the door and heard everything that was said.

Dick realized that he was very fortunate.

He had already gained much valuable information, and if allowed to remain where he was until the council of war was ended, he would gain still more.

At last, to his satisfaction, the British officers came to a decision.

It was decided that the fleet should proceed to Philadelphia—or as near there as it could go—when the troops would land and march to Philadelphia and capture the “rebel” capital, as the British officers called it.

It was decided, however, not to set sail at once.

“We must completely fool Washington,” said General Howe. “We must not let him suspect our intentions. We must throw him off the track altogether.”

“How are you going to do it?” asked his brother, the admiral. “Washington is an exceedingly shrewd man, and it will be a difficult matter to deceive him. So far, he has always seemed to know exactly what you were going to do.”

“That was because he sent spies who spied upon us and succeeded in securing information regarding our intended movements. That young rebel spy, Dick Slater, has been within our lines and even in my headquarters many times, and he has, I do not doubt, been a listener at our councils of war on more than one occasion. I would give five hundred pounds for his capture!”

“Well, this is one of the councils of war which there is no danger of his being a listener to,” said Admiral Howe, with a laugh.

Dick laughed also to himself.

He wondered what they would say and do were they to become suddenly cognizant of the fact that Dick Slater, the hated “rebel” spy, was at that very instant within ten feet of them and listening to every word that was uttered.

A few more words were exchanged between the officers, and then Admiral Howe said:

“Let us hear your plan for deceiving General Washington; we will then give you our opinion as to whether or not it will accomplish the purpose intended.”

“My plan is this,” said General Howe. “It is to sail here and there with the fleet in an erratic fashion. We will go up the Hudson a ways and then come back and go up the Sound; then we will put out to sea and then return and do the same things over again. In this manner we will puzzle

General Washington and make him think that we don't know what we want to do ourselves.”

“That isn't a bad idea,” said General Cornwallis.

“It seems to be a very good one,” said Admiral Howe.

“I think so,” said General Howe, complacently. “Another thing I will do: When we are ready to set sail for Philadelphia, after having made all these maneuvers and succeeded in getting General Washington thoroughly puzzled, I will write a letter to General Burgoyne, stating that our destination is Boston, and will contrive to have the letter fall into Washington's hands. Unless I am greatly mistaken, we will succeed in fooling the commander-in-chief of the rebel army nicely.”

“You might have done so,” thought Dick, “had I not been here to hear all this, but I don't think you will forget me—now.”

Dick had heard everything of importance that had been said during the council of war, and now, the conversation changing to matters of no particular interest to him, decided to vacate his post.

He had heard all that it was necessary to hear, anyway he had secured information which would be of inestimable value to General Washington.

It was of the utmost importance that he should succeed in reaching the commander-in-chief with this information.

It would be a terrible mishap if he should be discovered and captured.

He knew he was in danger of discovery.

His post was one of great danger, as some one might enter the cabin from the deck.

And then, too, the council of war was likely to break up at any moment.

Then some of the officers would be almost certain to come into the room he was in.

If he waited too long he might be discovered.

So Dick acted at once.

He stole softly across the room to the door at which he had entered.

As his hand touched the doorknob he heard a stir in the room occupied by the British officers.

The council of war was breaking up!

Dick heard the sound of footsteps.

They were approaching the door which he had just left. Dick realized that he must hasten.

In another instant the door might open and he might be discovered.

He pulled the door open.

He feared the watchman might be near at hand, but his fears proved to be groundless.

The watchman was some distance away, and going in a direction so that his back was toward Dick.

The youth heard the doorknob of the other door rattle. He realized that he had not an instant to lose.

He leaped through the doorway and pulled the door shut behind him.

Had the British officer opened the other door in time to see a sight of Dick?

The youth asked himself this question.

He listened.

Had the officer caught sight of Dick, he would no doubt have raised an outcry.

As there was no outcry, the youth decided that he had escaped detection.

He made his way rapidly, yet silently across the deck.

Dick decided not to return to the forecastle.

He had already accomplished all he had hoped to accomplish when he had come on board.

There was no reason why he should remain longer. In fact there was every reason why he should not remain. He was in danger every instant of time that he remained aboard the ship.

Therefore, it would be the wise thing to do to get off the ship at the earliest possible moment.

He made his way along the deck, going toward the stern. He moved very softly.

It happened that the watchmen were at about the middle of the ship, and, as it was a dark night, they could not see him.

There was a lantern hanging at the stern, but it did not give much light.

The illumination did not make things distinguishable for a distance of more than ten or fifteen feet.

Pausing just outside the portion of the deck made light by the lantern, Dick quietly and carefully climbed over the edge of the ship.

When he was over, he let himself down till he hung suspended by his hands, which grasped the edge of the deck. "I don't think they will be able to see my hands," Dick thought; "I will work my way around to the stern. I think likely that I will find a ladder there, and a boat; if so, I shall be all right."

Dick worked his way along.

It was slow work—and hard work, too.

He had to hold up the entire weight of his body with his arms.

He stuck to it, however, and worked his way along, and almost reached the stern, when he heard the slow, measured pace of the approaching watchman.

"Jove! what if he should see my fingers!" thought Dick; "I had better stop and keep them perfectly still, for if I move them they are much more likely to attract his attention. Well, one thing, if he sees them and goes to investigate, I will let go my hold and drop into the water. I can swim ashore easily—though it would be much more pleasant to row ashore in a boat."

Dick stopped and hung suspended, his hands remaining perfectly quiet.

Closer and closer came the footsteps of the watchman. Dick was on the alert.

The least hint from the fellow that he had seen the youth's hands would cause Dick to let go his hold and shoot downward to the water many feet below.

Dick's hands were near one of the uprights which supported the rail, however, and were thus partially shielded from view.

At any rate the watchman did not see Dick's hands.

He approached to within five or six feet, as near as the youth could judge, of where Dick hung suspended, and then, turning, started to go in the opposite direction.

Dick drew a breath of relief.

"Jove! I'm glad of that!" he said to himself; "I was not very eager for another swim in the bay!"

Feeling safe, now, Dick resumed progress, and was soon at the stern.

He was delighted to find the rope ladder there, just as it had been the night before.

In another instant he was on the ladder and descending rapidly.

He felt sure he would find a boat below, and he did.

He judged that it was the same boat he and his four sailor friends had used in coming off to the ship the night before.

In this surmise, doubtless he was right.

The boat was the same size and style of the one they had come aboard in, at any rate.

It did not matter, though.

It was a boat, and that was all Dick cared for.

He quickly untied the painter.

Then he seated himself and seized the oars.

Dick's movements had been shielded by darkness, so there was but little danger that he had been seen.

There was a lantern hanging at the stern, as we have said, but the flaring, thick bottom prevented the light from being reflected downward, and it was as dark below the lantern as it would have been had there been no lantern there at all.

What light the lantern did throw out was sideways to the right and left.

So Dick felt quite secure as he rowed slowly and silently away from the stern of the warship.

He was confident that he would succeed in escaping without any trouble now.

Dick rowed away, going in the direction of the shore at the northern end of Staten Island.

The British army was no longer there, and he could land there with impunity.

"I left Mr. Hardy's boat over at the pier at New York last night, and I don't suppose I will ever see it again; but I will leave this for Mr. Hardy in place of his. This is just as good a boat."

So mused Dick, as he rowed along.

He had no trouble in avoiding the warships.

The lanterns marked the location of the ships.

The distance to the shore of Staten Island was not great, but Dick took his time and rowed slowly.

He was in no particular hurry, and he did not wish to risk coming in collision with some other boat in the darkness on account of exercising undue haste.

It was better to go slow, keep a sharp ear out for the sound of oars, and be safe.

At last he was out from among the warships.

Then he headed away for the Staten Island shore and rowed more rapidly.

It was not likely he would encounter any boats after getting away from the vicinity of the warships.

So Dick thought; but he soon found out his mistake.

Suddenly he heard the swift strokes of oars.

The sound came from his left.

Dick knew from the sound that the approaching boat was close at hand.

He threw all his force and weight onto his oars, and tried to force his boat forward quickly enough to escape being run into.

He was too late, however.

Even as he did so the prow of the oncoming boat struck the boat Dick was in fair in the side.

The other boat was undoubtedly a large one, and manned by several oarsmen, for the side of Dick's boat was crushed in with as much ease as though it was an eggshell.

As he felt the jar of the impact, Dick threw himself out of the boat.

In this way he avoided the danger of being struck by the prow of the other boat.

"Hello! what have we struck?" cried a voice; "back water, all!"

CHAPTER X.

"THE LIBERTY BOYS'" CHALLENGE.

Dick was confident the inmates of the boat that had run into his boat were redcoats.

So he did not wish them to get sight of him.

He feared they might have a lantern.

He at once struck out and swam rapidly away from the spot.

He was not at all alarmed for his safety.

He felt confident that he would have no trouble in swimming to the shore.

If he got away from the vicinity before the redcoats caught sight of him, in case they did have a lantern, he would be safe.

If the redcoats had a lantern it had gone out.

At any rate they did not show one.

Dick heard them talking excitedly.

No doubt they thought they had caused the death of some one.

"All right," thought Dick; "you may think you have caused somebody to drown. It will make it easy for me to get away."

He swam rapidly.

He had a good idea as to the direction which he should go.

He kept on swimming, and, sooner than he expected, he reached the shore.

He drew a breath of relief as his feet touched bottom.

He waded ashore.

He did not pause an instant.

He walked rapidly forward.

He was soon on the spot where the British army had been encamped.

He knew this by the many heaps of ashes, and the sticks sticking up out of the ground—forked sticks which had been utilized in holding kettles suspended over the fires.

"I wonder if I will find Bob and Mr. Hardy up at the top of the hill?" Dick asked himself. "I rather think I shall find them there."

Dick hastened his footsteps.

He knew his way well.

He had been on this ground on two or three former occasions.

That he knew his way well was soon proven, for he found his way to the mouth of the ravine leading up toward the top of the hill, with unerring precision.

"Now I shall soon know whether or not Bob and Mr. Hardy are up there waiting for me," thought Dick.

He hastened his footsteps still more.

He hurried onward up the ravine and was soon at the end of it.

A few minutes longer and he was at the top of the hill.

"It that you, Dick?" called a voice in a subdued, yet eager tone.

"Yes, it is me, Bob," replied Dick.

He hastened forward and a moment later was shaking hands with Bob in a hearty manner.

"Mr. Hardy isn't here, eh, Bob?" said Dick, interrogatively.

"No, he went home to get some food for us. I expect we will meet him as we go."

"All right; come on, Bob, let's be moving. I am through work here for the present."

"And were you successful, Dick? Did you get aboard the warship?"

"Yes, Bob; and I succeeded in securing some very valuable information. It will please the commander-in-chief wonderfully, I know."

The youths set out in the direction of Mr. Hardy's cabin at once.

Bob was eager to hear the story of Dick's adventures.

He was likewise eager to know what the information was that Dick had secured.

Dick told Bob the story of his adventures, and told him what it was he had discovered.

Bob was delighted.

"Great guns! but you are a great one, Dick!" he exclaimed, enthusiastically; "what is it you can't do!"

Dick laughed.

"Oh, what I did was not so very difficult," he said, quietly; "you could have done the same things just as well."

"I doubt it, old man; I'm not cool-headed enough. I get rattled right at the critical moment and spoil all."

"Oh, I don't know, Bob; to my mind there are few more level-headed fellows than you."

The youths walked onward as rapidly as they could in the darkness and timber.

They went in as direct a course as possible, as they did

not want to miss Mr. Hardy, in case he had started back before they reached the cabin.

They covered the distance easily in an hour, and did not meet Mr. Hardy.

The reason was very simple.

He had not yet left home.

He was almost ready to start, however, but decided to postpone his trip indefinitely when the youths put in an appearance.

Mr. and Mrs. Hardy and Mabel were very glad to see the youths.

Especially was this the case as regarded Dick, for they knew that he had been engaged in a most dangerous and hazardous undertaking.

They were eager to hear the story of his adventures, and he told it as briefly as was possible.

"And now," he said when he had finished, "Bob and I must start at once for Morristown. I am anxious to place General Washington in possession of the information which I have secured."

They went at once to where their horses were and saddled and bridled them.

Mr. Hardy had taken care of the horses and had given them plenty of feed and water.

Returning to the house, the youths bade Mr. and Mrs. Hardy and Mabel good-by, and mounting their horses, rode away into the darkness.

It was now just about midnight.

The youths could take their time and reach their destination easily by sunrise.

And this was the way it turned out.

They reached Morristown just as the sun was rising.

They were greeted enthusiastically by their comrades, the "Liberty Boys of '76."

Dick knew that the commander-in-chief would not rise till about eight o'clock, so they remained in their quarters until breakfast was ready and ate their breakfast before reporting at headquarters.

Dick waited until sure that the commander-in-chief would be through with his breakfast, and then he made his way to headquarters.

The commander-in-chief greeted Dick warmly.

Several of the members of General Washington's staff were present.

They all knew Dick well and shook hands with him.

"Now, Dick, my boy, let's hear what you have to say," said General Washington; "I can tell by your looks that you have secured important information."

"You are right, your excellency," replied Dick.

And then he went ahead and told the commander-in-chief what he had learned.

General Washington and the members of his staff were delighted.

"You have done splendidly, Dick!" the commander-in-chief exclaimed. "So they are going to fool me by sailing here and there up and down the river, into the Sound, and out to sea, and back again, are they? Well, thanks to you, they will fool no one save themselves. The information which you have secured will make it possible for us to checkmate the British."

After Dick had given them all the information which he possessed, he saluted and withdrew.

He remained quietly in camp all that day and going to bed early in the evening he slept soundly all night.

He had been pondering a project the day before, and after breakfast he went to headquarters and had an interview with the commander-in-chief.

Dick knew that the British fleet would remain in New York Bay and vicinity several days making the maneuvers as planned by General Howe.

The British would wish to be seen by patriots, scouts and spies, and Dick's idea was that it would be a good plan to let the British know they were being watched.

He asked General Washington's permission for himself and his company of "Liberty Boys" to go over close to New York Bay and remain there a day or two, ostensibly to watch the maneuvering of the ships. Their real purpose would be to let the British know that their actions were being taken note of.

General Washington thought this would be a good plan, and readily gave his permission.

He saw no objections to all the "Liberty Boys" going along, as it would give them something to do and they were not needed in camp.

General Washington would not move southward with the patriot army until he was sure the British fleet had really set sail for Philadelphia.

As he would have a much shorter distance to traverse, he could wait several days after the fleet had sailed and still reach Philadelphia before the British could possibly get there.

As soon as Dick had secured the commander-in-chief's permission to put his plan into execution, he bade General Washington good-by, saluted, and withdrew.

He hastened back to the quarters occupied by the "Liberty Boys."

When he told them what he was going to do, they were delighted.

All made ready for the journey in his haste.

An hour later the entire company of "Liberty Boys" rode out of the encampment and away toward the east.

They arrived in the vicinity by noon.

They took up a position on an elevation nearly opposite New York.

They remained there all the rest of that day, that night and the next day.

During the two days they watched the maneuvers of the fleet, and managed to show themselves without seeming to do so intentionally.

At about ten o'clock the next day, the youths saw several boatloads of British soldiers coming across the river from New York City.

The British fleet was out of sight, having sailed out through the narrows.

"What does it mean, Dick?" asked Bob. "Why do you suppose are those redcoats coming across the river?"

"I'll tell you what I think, Bob. It is my belief that they saw us up here, interpreted it as being a challenge, and are coming over to offer us battle."

"Great guns! I believe you're right, Dick!"

"I'm sure I am, Bob. And when they have landed, I am going to make a certainty of it by sending one of the boys down with a challenge for them to come out into the open and fight."

"Hurrah!" cried Bob. "That's the way to talk! We haven't had a skirmish for so long that we are all getting rusty, and a fight will liven us up and make us feel like new men."

The other youths all said the same.

They were all eager for a fight.

Dick had paper, ink, and a quill with him, and he wrote a short letter challenging the British to come out in the open and fight.

This letter he gave to Sam Sunderland, and sent him with it under a flag of truce, and told him to deliver it to the commander of the British force.

Sam departed at once.

They saw him reach the British in safety.

He remained there for perhaps five minutes.

Then they saw him coming back.

He was back among them within a few minutes.

It took him but a moment to report.

The British had accepted the challenge to come out into the open and fight.

The result was a fierce hand-to-hand encounter between the patriots and redcoats.

Both parties reached the open at the same time.

It was patriots vs. redcoats, and they rushed at one another as if they would sweep their opponent off the earth.

They were about equal in numbers.

Three volleys were fired from each side, one from muskets and the other from pistols.

Then the two parties came together with a crash.

As we have said, it became a hand-to-hand encounter.

The "Liberty Boys" were in their element.

They fought with such energy, dash and impetuosity that there was no standing before them.

The redcoats did the best they could.

They fought with great valor.

It was no use, however.

They were no matches for the brave "Liberty Boys," and they were forced to give ground before the fierce onslaught of the patriot soldiers.

They kept fighting and retreating for awhile, and then finally became demoralized.

They turned and fled.

The flight became a rout.

They threw away their muskets in order to be enabled to run faster.

The "Liberty Boys" stopped pursuing them in obedience to an order from Dick, when they began throwing away their muskets.

The redcoats retreated to the boats, where they stopped.

A number of the British had been killed, and a greater number had been wounded.

Three of the "Liberty Boys" had fallen, and ten of them had been wounded; several of these quite seriously, but not necessarily fatally.

Selecting a pleasant spot, a grave was dug, and the three "Liberty Boys" who had fallen in the fight were laid to rest.

Then after the wounds of the others had been attended to, Dick sent a messenger down to the British telling them that they might return and bury their dead and take the wounded away.

"I guess they wish they hadn't accepted our challenge now, Dick," said Bob.

"I judge you are right, Bob," was the sober reply. "Well, I'm sorry for the poor fellows who met their death to-day. It is a bad business, but in time of war bloodshed is a necessity."

"True, Dick; and the redcoats are to blame, or rather their king is to blame. We certainly are not; we are fighting, practically, in self-defence, are fighting for liberty, and I do not think we should feel badly about these things at all."

"You are right, Bob; but to see bright, manly-looking fellows go down to death in this manner makes one's heart ache just the same."

The "Liberty Boys" remained in the vicinity until assured of the fact that the British fleet had really set sail for Philadelphia, and then they hastened back to Morristown to take the news to General Washington.

The commander-in-chief of the Continental army at once began making preparations to checkmate this last move of the British.

THE END.

The next number (19) of "The Liberty Boys of '76" will contain "THE LIBERTY BOYS TRAPPED; OR, THE BEAUTIFUL TORY," by Harry Moore.

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